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ANSWERING FOOD AND DRUG QUERIES -- NO. 3

A radio talk by W. G. Campbell, Food and Drug Administration, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, Tuesday, October 24, 1933, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC radio stations.

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After many years' experience in enforcing our national pure food and drug law, I am convinced that the majority of our food and drug manufacturers are honest and ethical. But I cannot deny that a small minority is more concerned with making money than with conserving public health. Our food and drug law is intended to control this minority. If the law cannot do this, something is wrong. In this series of talks, I am pointing out to you the places where our present food and drugs act falls short and how the new food and drugs bill, S. 1944, which Senator Copeland has introduced in Congress, will strengthen the Government's authority to safeguard your food and drug supply.

This bill, Senate 1944, retains all the valuable features of the present law. But it adds new provisions which deal with modern conditions in the manufacture and distribution of foods and drugs, and give the public full protection.

I have given two talks in this program explaining some of the leading provisions of the Copeland bill. On October 13th, I described the dangers to children of the so-called "prize candies" -- which in many instances have caused injury to youngsters. I told of the serious limitations our present law imposes on us in controlling poisons in foods, and how the Copeland bill will remove those limitations.

On September 26th, I spoke of the dangers attendant upon the use of worthless or harmful patent medicines. I said they are sold because a joker in the present statute makes it impossible for the Government to stop some of the most grossly flagrant and dishonest labeling and advertising of nostrums. The Copeland bill will enable the Government to end such cheating.

Today, I shall tell you about a few of the many abuses we find in the sale of medicines containing potent poisons. I shall also tell you something about dangerous cosmetics. Now I have no intention of condemning cosmetics in general. "Beautifiers" in this day and age are quite evidently an essential commodity and relatively few of them are dangerous. Undeniably, reputable cosmetic manufacturers deplore the practices of the few whose unscrupulous disregard for everything but money profits has brought misery to the people who use their products.

But before I talk about cosmetics, I want to consider with you our present legal handicaps in the control of poisonous medicines.

The present law requires that if a medicine contains any one of a very limited number of dangerous or habit-forming drugs -- such as acetanilid, morphine, alcohol, chloral hydrate -- the label must bear a statement of the presence and amount of the drug. We rigidly enforce this requirement of the law. But, unfortunately, the present law, passed by Congress nearly 30 years ago, fails to name many new drugs -- just as potentially dangerous as the ones that are named, but discovered by the chemist since the law was enacted.

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Among the drugs capable of harming the user which have come into common use since the passage of the pure food and drug law are the various barbituric acid derivatives, including sodium amytal, luminol-sodium, amytal, and barbital. Derivatives of barbituric acid are frequently used as "sleeping powders" and nerve sedative mixtures. They have their place in medicine but they should be used under supervision and with great discrimination or they may injure or even kill, rather than relieve the patient.

Other drug preparations recommended for the relief of pain contain cinchophen, which has likewise come into use since the passage of the food and drug law. These pain relievers are often recommended for rheumatism, neuritis, and similar disorders. The present law does not require manufacturers to declare the presence of this dangerous drug, cinchophen, upon their labels. But cinchophen causes atrophy of the liver and deaths due to unwise use of preparations containing the drug are on the increase.

Products containing these and other injurious or habit-forming drugs can be purchased without prescription by anyone at almost any drugstore. Injudicious use and overdosing with any of these products may easily result in severe illness or death. Our present law does not even require that these poisons be declared on the label.

Many headache powders and other types of "pain relievers" contain acetanilid. Our present law insists that acetanilid be declared on the label, but does not require the label to warn against overdosage or too frequent repetition of the dose. Acetanilid relieves pain attributed to some causes -- but it is a powerful heart depressant. Deaths reported as due to overdosages of "pain relievers" containing this powerful drug are repeatedly noted in the medical literature. Plainly, the present law does not give the public sufficient protection. The ordinary purchaser hardly can be expected to know that this drug may cause serious illness or death. If real protection is to be afforded the buyer, the label must not only declare the presence of the potent drug, but give adequate information about its dangerous properties. The Copeland bill will require this.

There are some drugs so extremely poisonous that they should under no circumstances be permitted indiscriminate distribution. Our present law contains no prohibitive provision.

Some time ago a prominent citizen of Pittsburgh died a terrible death. He had taken large doses of a radioactive water, known as Radithor. The medicine killed him. The radium gradually causes the bones of his head to disintegrate.

Now Radithor actually is a radioactive water. Government experts found it to contain the amount of radium declared on the label. The label told the truth. Under our present law the Government could take no action against its manufacturer-- even if Radithor should kill thousands of people. The Copeland bill will correct this condition. It gives the Government power to control the sale of drugs and medicines containing poison.

Now for cosmetics. A well-known cosmetic, Koremlu, claimed to be an effective hair remover, was sold everywhere. Koremlu did remove hair; in fact, it sometimes removed every single hair from the body of the user and did other physical damage. Koremlu contained a deadly poison, thallium acetate. Many women who used it suffered serious and permanent injury.

Before me are two photographs. One shows the likeness of a really beautiful woman -- the other, taken a few days later, represents the same woman -- but her eyes are sightless and her face disfigured with suffering -- she is one of the many victims of a poisonous dye recommended to lend lure to eyelashes. A specialist of the Administration analyzed this preparation, and found that it contains an extremely injurious coal tar dye. This explains why some women who use this stuff are having the outer coating of their eyeballs burned off and are becoming blind as a result.

We have in our so-called Chamber of Horrors at our Washington offices specimens of other cosmetics scarcely less dangerous. I refer to such things as hair dyes containing poisonous lead and silver compounds. Yet despite these dangers the Government offers you no protection, because the present food and drug law contains no provision, whatsoever, applying to cosmetics. It defines a drug as a product intended for use in the prevention, cure, or treatment of disease. The poisonous beautifiers that I have mentioned were not labeled with remedial claims and the Food and Drug Administration cannot prevent their sale.

How would the Copeland bill deal with cosmetics? The manufacturer of a cosmetic who incorporated poisons into his preparation would certainly run afoul of this new law should it be enacted as now drawn. It declares cosmetics adulterated if they may be harmful under the prescribed or customary conditions of use or if they contain any poisonous or harmful ingredient. It prohibits false or misleading claims in labels or advertising.

Now, I do not believe that the Federal government should try to tell its citizens just what drugs and cosmetics they may use and in what quantities. All of us know people who are intemperate in eating, exercising, or in sleeping. Nevertheless, our national spirit of independence and individualism would revolt against a governmental attempt to limit our food, our exercise, or our sleep. But there are few who will deny that the Government does owe its citizens protection against indiscriminate sale of dangerous drugs and poisonous cosmetics.

A strengthened food and drug law, such as the Copeland measure, will become a reality if you want it. In order that you may consider the measure intelligently and reach your own conclusion about it, I am going to give you additional facts about the pending bill in future broadcasts during the Farm and Home Hour. If you want a copy of the bill, write your Congressman, and ask for Senate 1944. And if you desire descriptive material about the bill, write the Federal Food and Drug Administration, Washington, D. C.

